

Russian Orthodox Church  
King Salmon Vicinity  
Savononski-Abandon City  
Bristol Bay  
Alaska

HABS NO. AK-86

HABS  
AK  
4-KISALV,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-86

HABS  
AK  
4-KISAL.V  
2-

- Location: Savonoski, between King Salmon and Naknek on the south side of the Naknek River, Alaska.
- Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.
- Present Occupant/  
Use: Vacant.
- Significance: A number of Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. Unusual sawtooth ornament over the windows, reminiscent of Russian church decoration, enlivens this rectangular, gable-roofed church. Built by survivors of the Katmai volcanic eruption, who moved here to re-establish their village in 1912, the church is now abandoned.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical Description:

1. Date of erection: After 1912. The residents of Old Savonoski, which was destroyed by the Katmai volcano eruption in 1912, moved here and re-established their village. They probably built their church soon after moving.
2. Original plans and construction: The nave, sanctuary, and narthex are one block, covered by a gable roof. The narthex does not appear to be an addition. Unusual sawtooth ornament over the windows -- in more of an A shape than a pediment -- is an unusual touch, reminiscent of Russian ornament.
3. Alterations and additions: The vestibule has been replaced. The present vestibule is close in dimensions to the previous one.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A rectangular plan and a gable roof encompass the sanctuary, nave, and narthex.
2. Condition of fabric: deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block, incorporating nave and sanctuary, measures 16'-5" x 40'-2", with a 9'-4" x 10'-9" vestibule.
2. Foundations: Sill boards on the ground on pads of wood.
3. Walls: Walls are covered with horizontal beveled siding, painted white with green trim. The west side of the vestibule is sided with narrow beaded boards.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Stoop: Plank stoop.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The double-leaf front doors have two round-arched panels, with a molded panel below. One panel has been replaced.
  - b. Windows: The windows have six-light, fixed sash. Above each window is a triangle made of sawtooth molding.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The gable roof is covered with wood shingles painted red. The vestibule has a separate, lower gable roof.
  - b. Cupola: There is a square, pyramidal-roofed cupola with lights on two sides. The roof and walls are covered with wood shingles.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space. The western third of the nave is delineated as the narthex by an arch. The sanctuary on the east is separated from the nave by the iconostas, and the vestibule is on the west end.
2. Stairways: There is a three-step amvon with a semi-octagonal projection in the center and krilos on the sides.
3. Flooring: The floors of the nave and narthex are covered with linoleum. The sanctuary and amvon floors are tongue-and-groove boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Flush horizontal boards, painted white with green trim. The interior of the vestibule is unfinished.
5. Doorways: There is a four-panel door between the vestibule and the narthex.

6. Decorative features: The iconostas is wood-framed, with flush boards on the nave side and cloth on the sanctuary side. The doorways are slightly arched, but not the doors. There are a few faded decorations on the iconostas; the icons have been removed. Wooden candle stands in the nave appear handmade.

A square cupola, with chamfered corners so as to appear octagonal, rises from the nave, through the roof. Light from windows in the cupola flows into the nave.

7. Mechanical equipment: The building is equipped with electricity.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is set on a bluff, overlooking the flat land abutting the river, where the now-abandoned village was. The only structures in the village today relate to a seasonal fish camp. The church faces northwest, but in this report it has been treated as if the church faced west, with the altar on the east end.
2. Historic landscape design: The church is set in a cemetery, surrounded by an unusual picket fence. There is a plank boardwalk across the tundra, and stairs up to the church.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Chuan, Paul, the warden, who was born in Naknek in 1901, interviewed by author May 30, 1990.

Wallace, Fern A. The Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plate 111 is a photograph of the church showing a bellstand on the north side of the vestibule.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Russian Orthodox Church at Savonoski was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO  
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
King Salmon Vicinity  
Bristol Bay  
Alaska

HABS No. AK-86

HABS  
AK  
4-KISALV,  
2-

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013